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ABSTRACT

The Research and Development Exchange (RDx) is a network of regional educational laboratories and university-based research and development centers working to support state and local school improvement efforts. Primary recipients of the services of all regional exchanges are dissemination specialists in state education agencies. The Northwest Regional Exchange (NWRx) located at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) designed the State Consultant Model--a team approach to working, both individually and collectively, with the six state departments of education in its region. This report describes the experience in Oregon with the State Consultant Model. (Author/MLF)

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The Experience of One State Agency with the State Consultant Model

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The Experience of One State Agency with the State Consultant Model

I. The SEA Setting

Functions and services vary considerably from one state education agency (SEA) to another. Generally, there is considerable similarity in regulatory functions relative to the standardization of state schools and in the administration of federal programs. The differences in SEA characteristics lie primarily in the areas of leadership activities and services. These activities are minimal in some states and very extensive in others. This report describes the experience of one state with the State Consultant Model initiated by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's Dissemination Program.

The Oregon SEA is an average-sized agency with roughly 150 professional level employes. Approximately half of its efforts is devoted to regulatory functions and half to providing leadership and services to local education agencies (LEAs). In recent years the agency has encountered growing pressure to restrict or reduce the size of its staff and operating budget. At the same time, new programs, new priorities, new legislation, and inflation are imposing additional demands on all agency programs. As in other units of the Department, the Center for Program Coordination (our section) finds itself with limited staff, a shrinking budget and a long list of responsibilities.

The dissemination activities at the SEA are located in the Center for Program Coordination, which is a unit in the Instructional Services Division. The Center has twelve professional positions and has responsibility for the following programs:

- Capacity Building Program (Dissemination)
- Professional Resource Center
- Curriculum Development Activities
- ESEA Title IV - Parts B, C and D

- Instructional Technology (Media, Instructional Radio and TV)
- Personnel Development Programs in Career Education
- Career Education Coordination
- Special Development Project
- Anti-discrimination training modules
- Support materials to implement new standards

Each one of these responsibilities could conceivably use a separate administrative staff. The reality of the situation finds a single staff member trying to fulfill the requirements of multiple programs. Fortunately, there is a unity of purpose in most of these activities. Common to all of them, for example, is supporting an active effort to improve school practice and to increase equity for educational opportunity for all students.

II. The Capacity-Building Grant

Through NIE, most states have had or have capacity-building grants aimed toward increasing state dissemination capabilities. Oregon's grant will be going into its fifth and final year starting in July. From its beginning, the goal of the Oregon project was to establish a resource base and to develop a state communication network with the capacity to match resources with identified needs of state educators. The utlimate goal was to improve programs.

In light of studies by Seiber and others and from our experience with a pilot dissemination program in 1970-73, our dissemination program accepted certain premises from the beginning. These were:

1. The program would develop with existing staff.
2. All components would be institutionalized from the onset and NIE funds would be used primarily for developmental costs, new resources and training.

3. Any communication network would emphasize interpersonal linkages at all network nodes.

4. Any state network would develop as a sharing venture with participating LEAs, intermediate units and other associated agencies.

To date, the basic components of a state dissemination system are in place as evidenced by the following:

1. There is a fairly comprehensive resource base consisting of:

   - Computer access through the DIALOG System to ERIC, Psychological Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts, Dissertation Abstracts, and others
   - Working relationships with department specialists
   - Special files--school standards, goal collections, promising practices, special education, career/vocational education, reading consultants, information packets, and others.

2. There are from twenty to thirty linkers at intermediate units and LEAs who perform information searches to one degree or another.

3. Three regions of the state have developed computerized information services independently.

It is estimated that about 70 to 80 percent of the state schools' population can be served by the existing services. What is lacking is a statewide coordinated network effort. As an SEA employe I could see what needed to be done but the task of getting all potential actors involved in a sharing network was taking longer than planned because of the lack of adequate staff.

III. The State Consultant Model

Through the first part of the capacity-building project, Oregon was one of six states participating in the Regional Exchange program through the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL). The activities of the Exchange program were helpful to the state in exchanging and sharing information with other states. Through the exchange program we had access to R&D products and in turn

R&D centers were informed of the information and resource needs of SEAs and LEAs. A resource catalog identifying all lab projects was one major result of this effort and it became an additional directory of promising practices.

Less than a year ago, the State Consultant Model was instituted by the Regional Exchange program. From the Oregon SEA point of view this activity has had a most significant impact on our state program. If I may repeat, when the model was initiated, our SEA dissemination program staff had multiple responsibilities and tended to move slowly in any given area of activity. In this situation any direct assistance, no matter how small, was enough to accomplish what the straw did that "broke the camel's back" in reverse. The state consultant program was the impetus needed at that right moment in the right place to really move statewide activities.

In one sense the title, State Consultant Model, is a misnomer. It has turned out to be much more comprehensive than consultant services. From our point of view the net effect has been a collaborative effort of two agencies to combine resources to achieve common goals.

Some of the major activities that have resulted from joint planning efforts with technical assistance from the Lab are briefly described as follows:

1. Process Seminar III. In July 1979, the Lab sponsored a national seminar designed to assist managers to develop training events. The State Consultant Model permitted the state agency to send representatives to this seminar. As a result, plans were developed for a statewide conference to initiate a state communication network. This moved our program timetable up by approximately six months. The technical assistance provided by the seminar allowed the conference planning group to incorporate tested training ideas into the program.

2. Process Seminar IV. The Oregon conference had two purposes: first, to locate resources and services which supported program improvement throughout the state; and second, to initiate the formation of a shared communication network. By coincidence, Seminar IV sponsored by the Lab was on "Networking." Once again state conference planners attended this seminar. Much of the content and materials used at the seminar were incorporated into the program of the state conference.

3. State Conference. The State Conference had the theme, "Bridging Resources with Needs." It was a two-day meeting which brought together approximately 100 individuals who were information linkers or representatives of agencies which provided resources and related services. NWREL staff, through the State Consultant Model, provided much of the instruction and technical assistance for the conference program. The conference was the kick-off in establishing the state communication network.

4. The Resource Sourcebook. One purpose of the State Conference was to collect information about available resources and services throughout the state. By May-June, the lab will compile the information into a resource sourcebook complete with abstracts of available resources from various centers and agencies in the state. The sourcebook will be designed to be used (1) by linkers to identify sources for resources needed by teachers and administrators and (2) by decision-makers to find resources needed to plan for program improvement.

5. Training to Develop Transformation Skills. In our program we have found that many documents are not readily used because of the format or length of the document. Frequently, documents prepared in research are not used by classroom teachers, even though the implications of its contents may be quite relevant. In the transformation process retrieved information can be tailored into a format or style which the user will find relevant and understandable. The Lab is planning with the SEAs of Oregon and Hawaii to develop a training program that will identify and develop some practical transformation skills.

6. A Study in Communication Technology. Through a similar arrangement the Lab's Dissemination Program is working with several state SEAs to study the technology and media used by business and industry to communicate to audiences in remote locations of the states.

7. Anti-Discrimination Workshop. Recently, the Department developed an anti-discrimination workshop. By September the workshop will have been attended by 7,000 teachers who are scheduled for teaching certificate renewals. The Dissemination Program, through the consultant team approach assisted the Department in developing a "Learner's Log" and "Facilitator's Manual" for the program.

8. Continuous Planning. Perhaps the most significant activity in the State Consultant Model is the consistent and dependable contact and planning that takes place throughout the year.

9. Developing LEA Models. Through collaborative efforts of the Lab, the state agency and selected LEAs, a model for developing and implementing a staff development/program improvement program using a comprehensive resource base and a communication network will be explored during the year.

The activities described in this report are tangible and signficant products and services rendered through the Lab's State Consultant Model Program. Each has been a significant milestone to achieve the objectives of the state's capacity-building program. These services in reality have been more of a collaborative effort. I would attribute much of the success on several conditions that seem to exist in this working relationship. These are:

1. The similarity and clarity of objectives of the Consultant Model approach and the capacity-building program.

2. The positive interpersonal communication channels that exist.

3. The complementary way in which staff competence and governance of each organization dovetail.

4. The responsive mode of Consultant Model services to meet the needs of the state.

5. The priority given to states by Lab personnel. Our consultants have proved to be reasonably available and always dependable to follow through with commitments.

GK:ah
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